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Character Training in the Elementary School

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July 1933

Acknowledgment

Dedicated to:

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to
My husband, E. W. D. Lethridge.

Miss E. Elizabeth Prosser who has faithfully
assisted me in the preparation of this study.
Though he sleeps beneath the sod, I
owe it to him that I continued to go forward.

Acknowledgment

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to
Miss H. Elizabeth Brogwell who has faithfully
assisted me in the preparation of this study.

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1. 1. Parents

2. 2. Environment

B. Student government

1. 1. Student councils

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2. rage
3. pugnacity
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(note this list is enlarged in text)

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We must aim by organization and by formal instruction to establish such habits by reaction on the moral side as to establish the conduct of the individual as a citizen. This moral phase of our education seeks from each pupil courtesy which is the virtue of social life; and dependability which is the virtue of ethical life. It also endeavors to establish in each pupil the crowning good of a humble spirit which is the virtue of religion. The keynote here is a reverent regard for the rights of others and a wise orienting of the pupil for right living.

Character making has not achieved its present work in the schools for the reason that there has been no common basis of accepted guidance and what is more important pedagogically, there has been no interpretation of these principles into concrete specific terms in the child's mind. We need a literature couched not only in the language of childhood but in the thought form of childhood.

The writer because of teaching experience has reached the

Character Training in the Elementary School

Introduction

Statement of Problem: There is a wide spread need of a clear understanding of what even the unreflective mind believes to be essential in the life and education of each individual. We have talked about character, discipline and education and we have endeavored in countless ways to accomplish the character discipline of the individual. Some of these ways have been wise, others have not.

We must aim by organization and by formal instruction to establish such habits by reaction on the moral side as to establish the conduct of the individual as a citizen. This moral phase of our education seeks from each pupil courtesy which is the virtue of social life; and dependability which is the virtue of ethical life. It also endeavors to establish in each pupil the crowning good of a humble spirit which is the virtue of religion. The keynote here is a reverent regard for the rights of others and a wise orienting of the pupil for right living.

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The writer because of teaching experience has reached the

conclusion that the big problem facing homes, communities, and schools, is that of surrounding the child with the environment that is conducive to character building when the child enters the world; and to carry and fix certain ideals in his mind when he reaches the thought stage which is in the elementary school.

With this in mind, we turn our attention to a definition of character.

Definition of terms: Character is one's way of reacting to life situations. Character is the sum total of one's ways of responding that have become totally set. ¹ A reserve force which reacts directly by presence and without means is what we call character. ² Character, according to another definition, is the peculiar qualities of a person or thing; reputation standing; ³ person with peculiar standing.

Passing from the definition of the term the write shall attempt to give the scope study.

Scope of Study: The write has in this paper, covered character as to where training should begin, the emotion and instinct and their effects on character, methods of training for character and the importance of this training.

Methods of Procedure: The data was secured through the reading of many books on character education, ^cprinciples of character making, psychologies, periodicals and magazines. The writer has

¹ Germane and Germane, Character Education.

² Holmes, Principles of Character Making.

³ Webster's Standard Dictionary.

also discussed the subject with her teachers and last of all, the writer has had wide experience as a teacher; having seen the dire need of such training.

The material herein is arranged in an order that will lead us from one thought to the other building up their need and offering some remedial measures until the conclusion has been reached.

Real Origin of Individual Character

Hereditary Character: Some parental characteristics are mixed in the offspring but their father's and mother's traits are descended to them in separate and some times warring impulses. So we see that character begins before birth in the life of the parent.

Continuation from generation to generation: If we should trace the source of the individual as far as we can go, we will have to accept the theories of continuity from generation to generation. We know it is the essence of the living creature to vary, that variability is a primary property of organisms. The sequence of generations is a life stream changing as it flows.

Instincts form the foundation of character: Instincts are the reactions upon which the character maker can exercise his skill. Though other processes of consciousness will speedily supervene, during all of childhood the primary impulses to action and the most prolific source of habit will be these blind impulses. The instincts proper are sucking, biting, chewing, licking,

¹ Herbert Spencer's - Autobiography.

grimacing, spitting, clasping, crying, smiling and sitting up, stading, walking, talking, emulation, imitation, pugnacity, anger, resentment, fear of many things, constructiveness, modesty, shame, and love.¹ Prodigious as this as is this array of instincts, and prodigious also is their importance in determining human character.

In moral sentiments and adaptations the child is as plastic as in any form of learning. Primitive tendencies are the basis of character development, but the ultimate structure of character is very much a product of training.

The child untrained morally becomes a radically different person from one receiving suitable instruction and guidance.

What does the child bring to school with him? The child brings with him to school certain inherent or native tendencies. This original nature of the child is the foundation on which we build. The stock of native tendencies with which everyone is born is capable of moral achievement or criminal degradation. A close consideration of the instinctive tendencies of childhood leaves one deeply impressed with the critical significance of the kind of early training the child receives.

Even from the first days of infancy practice having a wholesome moral direction may be followed. Regularity of eating and sleeping is a good beginning. As time passes the child is taught to restrain from snatching things, and restraint is placed upon violent anger. The sharing of playthings, and the doing of little acts of courtesy which receive approval awaken a conscious-

¹Preyer - Schneider, James, - On Instincts.

ness of good conduct. With older children attention to the need of telling things as they happened is important. Possibly no habit can be established early in life which has greater social promise than that of careful reporting of incidents and painstaking accuracy of statement.

Through Guidance: It is not possible to make much headway in moral training, even of the very young, without having in mind the objectives of moral training. A considerable body of moral law has been defined and approved for a long time, although the variation of moral ideals among different peoples is not to be disregarded. But most of us regard as imperative such virtues as honesty, honor, truthfulness, industriousness, fair play, kindness, dutifulness to parents, regard for age, humaneness, and the like. The person who undertakes to guide the moral training of a child soon discovers the need of meditation upon the character of the instruction to be given.

Having in mind the character of life today one would need to compile many items of instruction to be added to the traditional rules of morality. If moral development is to be a constructive achievement rather than a negative status, the parent or teacher would need to suggest and provide opportunities for the practice of sentiments and forms of conduct not formerly emphasized. We find also that ideas are supreme in character making. They are the real stuff out of which we are made. Feelings and thought are much more real than anything else, they are the only things which we directly know

to be real.¹ To be exact what a man thinks he will do.²

The school must afford for the child unlimited opportunities for practicing with satisfaction desirable character traits as they arise in the life problems of the children are unlimited in their possibilities. If in his daily adjustments, the child repeatedly finds satisfaction in being honest, obedient, reliable, industrious, thrifty, fair, accurate, and generous, he is slowly but none the less surely making these traits an integral part of his personality. The correction of faults means replacing good habits for bad habits.

The child must want to do right. He must feel the need of changing from wrong, if growth in character is to be permanent. But the child must have a feeling urge, or mental set for good before he acts economically to acquire the good. This attitude can and will be developed, if out of the child's own life experience he is made to feel a disgust for the wrong habit and is helped to see how he is the loser by practicing it. Merely theoretically talking and reasoning with a child about the value of good habits are of little value. On the other hand, we need not allow a child to burn himself before we tell him the stove is hot. The best results will be obtained if vigilance, warning, and explanation are closely associated with experience. After a child has met with a situation, sympathizing and reasoning with him to show why he succeeded or failed will help in the development of emotionalized repulses toward the bad habit and of impelling desires for choosing and

¹ Holmes - Character Making.

² Germane and Germane - Character Education.

practicing the right one.

Growth in character comes as does growth in handwriting, spelling, or arithmetic. It is chiefly a matter of practicing the right so often that the nerve connections which give the desired response become firmly bonded. If we would have children to learn to be tidy, careful, patient, honest, courteous, fair and kind, then we must provide them with many life situations which can and will afford much practice over definite nerve paths. Thus will the desired connections be made and the habits firmly formed. For effective and economical development of character traits the child must not only desire to build up a certain habit and practice it, but he must practice it with satisfaction. Satisfaction in achieving commendable results will guarantee that that the child will make the right choices. Undesirable conduct may result because of getting satisfaction in practicing it. Children will make changes when the old type of response is no longer satisfactory. By rewarding the new, desired response and attaching annoyances to the undesired response, parents and teachers can stimulate the formation of desirable habits. Parents, teachers, and social groups should aid in the functioning of the law of satisfaction by praising all attempts of the child to make choices. If these principles of character training are practiced during the first twelve years of the child's life, he will have not only have formed thousands of specific good habits but, what is of much greater value will have acquired cer-

tain mental sets, attitudes and concepts for right conduct that will carry over into all life situations.¹

This training for character must take into consideration the differences of children. The most important one is the age difference and this we will briefly discuss:

Recognition of Age Differences: The moral training must be adapted to the age of the child. With the growth of intelligence a greater appeal may be made to understanding. Obedience must at first be to some extent unreasoning, at least to children in primary grades. During later childhood and adolescence the very heart of moral instruction is the explanation of why and wherefore. Indeed it is just as necessary to give reasons in moral training as in training in general arithmetic and science. Moral habit is more binding if it is formed under consciousness of logical certainty.

Agencies of Character Instruction: A number of agencies unite to impart moral instruction. The home is unquestionably the most important agency. Before reaching school age the child receives many impressions regarding proper and improper behavior and has established moral habits. The family conversation, the attitude in the family toward neighbors, toward government, toward foreign peoples and the like leave an imprint. Vision shown in discussions in the family regarding social, civic, and ethical questions is of critical importance. The activities of home life are a foundation of character. The moral

impressions and training given in the home are reinforced by the influence of the school. The general atmosphere of the school, its standards and practices are influential. The extent to which pupils feel responsibility for the welfare of the school and participate in self government is a vital consideration. In every study pursued in school moral lessons are involved. In history, in reading matter, in geography, in civics, in hygiene, and other studies, practical applications can be made to social and moral relationships. Indeed so fertile is the program of studies in moral implications that it is often thought unnecessary to give specific lessons in morals. In New Zealand, and in the United States quite commonly, it is assumed that the moral training of the pupil was sufficiently recognized and cultivated through the studies and activities of the school itself. More specific consideration might prove advantageous.

Week day religious instruction, recently advanced in some quarters, appears to be an administrative device rather than an attempt at the reorganization of teaching methods and materials. To the extent to which week day instruction in religion would intensify credal and sectarian differences it would be deplorable. Now in the event that no sectarian instruction were imparted one is left with the question why the public school organization should not be entrusted with the teaching of a common subject matter. The paramount issue in moral instruction today is that of making applications of principles of conduct to the specific situation of modern life, a procedure in which the public schools are well fitted to play a prominent part.

How the School can Build Character: If character education means helping the child to learn to adjust himself normally, healthfully, and successfully to his many life situations (his environment) then what opportunities does the teacher have for help and guidance in the school?

How Teaching Effects Growth in Character: Many crucial life situations of the child arise in connection with his daily lessons. If he is failing in one or more subjects he is certain to make unsatisfactory adjustments to the many of life's situations. For instance, a boy fails repeatedly in history. What does he experience? What part of the subject matter does he learn? Does he learn to study better? How will these experiences effect his love for history ten, twenty, thirty, years from now? What attitudes is he forming toward his teacher, his chums, his school, and society in general?

and
But the most significant^{and} far reaching query is: What does the failing child think of himself? Have these experiences increased or diminished^{his} his faith and confidence in himself; have they quickened or slowed his dreams of future victory or conquest? Have they sharpened or dulled his enthusiasm for living and learning; have they diminished the sum total of those wholesome personal adjustments which will make him stronger in tellectually and emotionally for the succeeding conflict? If schoolroom conditions make the answers to these questions confessions of failure, then one beholds a cross section not only of a life of a failing child but of a man's failure twenty years hence.

For failure even in childhood, is fertile soil in which germinate such traits as sullenness, stubbornness, indifference, irritability, lack of self control, selfishness; intolerance, jealousy and inferiority. In failure, pride and self respect are vanquished. The child must succeed. Not the knowledge itself is so significant; but rather the child's attitudes and his estimation of himself are significant. Teaching which helps the child to succeed, which enables him to realize his possibilities and insures wholesome character development. Thus the selection of subject matter and its presentation in ways that assures success become vital factors in the development of the strong character, the poised personality.

Too often the hidden but real causes of a child's belligerency are not discovered until it is too late. The teacher's crowded schedule is apt augment her failure to think of each child as a unique individuality, unlike any other child, one that needs be understood before he can be helped permanently. Often the injustice done a child by hasty conclusions taints and tinctures his whole attitude toward life. The mistake is made unintentionally by the teacher but the fact does not lessen the consequences one iota. The use that is known as the "Case study method" will do much to prevent such errors.¹ There are several worthy studies on this topic setting forth the technique to be used in diagnosing and dealing with children. These studies not only enumerate the several possible and probable factors operating to cause delinquencies, but they suggest ways of diagnosing, al-

leviating and remedying the defects. The case study form when use sincerely, causes the teacher to stop, look and collect all facts about character training.

A third and vital opportunity is providing the children daily with many situations for self choosing , self judging, for self controlling, for self governing.

If we would have the child possess desires for, or habits of, truth telling, open-mindedness, and justice we must permit him to experience the joy of living in an environment where truth telling, open-mindedness and justice reign. The child must do the choosing. He must feel satisfaction when he chooses the right, and annoyance when he chooses the wrong. In brief there will be true moral growth in the degree that the child has the opportunity to make right decisions, and to practice with satisfaction those virtues which make for stability of character.

The Home and School: If the child is to make real growth in character he must live in a continuously and consistently wholesome environment, obviously including the home as well as the school, to put the job over, independent of the other's cooperation, a definite program for character education will be futile. On the other hand, the home and the school can cooperate most effectively in working out a day by day schedule of life situations that will give the children exercise of those moral muscles that need strengthening most. This can be done by studying the needs of children and remedying them.

Emotional Drive in Behavior: Attitudes and sentiments are peculiarly vital in the moral responses. A calculating tendency seems out of place in many crises of moral decision. The ethical nature must be adapted to emergency use and it is highly important how the attitudes and sentiments stand.

Thus character training involves especially emotional control. Let us consider a few cases of how the control of emotion is effected:

By having his attention directed to motherless little birds a boy acquires a sentiment against shooting song birds. The strategic point in setting up moral sentiment is the phase of the total situation which is selected for intensive consideration.

The susceptibility of the child and adolescent to social suggestion makes it doubly necessary that the emotions be controlled through group contacts. It is next to impossible to offset the sentiments generated in the gang or popular to the group. Hence it is desirable that the neighborhood, play ground and street associations be guarded.

Other Aids in Character Training

The Parent-Teacher Club: In this club there is opportunity for mutual help and understanding. The parents and teachers may cooperate by organizing themselves into study groups, meeting every two weeks for the school hour of the day. Here can be discussed the psychological principles involved in transforming the home and school into laboratories that will provide rich exper-

ience for personality development. A definite list of the specific traits the home and school shall attempt to strengthen most can be agreed upon; a cooperative program for the development of these traits can be worked out, such as the following:

I. The study of development.

A. Why he is delinquent.

1. Means of improving his environment.

II. The need of social activities.

A. Music clubs.

B. Reading clubs.

C. Hiking clubs.

III. The need of recreational facilities.

A. Types of play and apparatus.

1. Volley ball.

2. Indoor ball.

3. Tennis.

4. Swings.

5. Slides.

Parents and teachers will cooperate in earnest in the years to come when they sense the value of each child possessing a poise attractive personality and a steadfast character. Earnest and wise teacher and parent study groups may be the source of almost unlimited possibilities of human progress.

Play as a Maker of Character: A child who does not play not only misses much of the joy of childhood but he can never be a fully developed adult. He will lack in manhood many of the qualities

most worthwhile because many of the avenues of growth were unused and neglected during the plastic period of his life.¹

Play may be regarded as an instinctive tendency. Little children get many of their meanings of life through play. To deny them an outlet for this play impulse not only retards their physical growth, but what is equally serious, may excite many emotional disorders, moods, and mental responses, such as, bad temper, irritability, bullying, contradicting, lack of initiative, dissatisfaction, excitability, impudence, and inferiorities. Not only do the traits of sterling character that may be developed through play and work supplant the defects listed but they insure a personality of balanced character and stability.²

Froebel says, "Play is the purest and most spiritual activity of man". Froebel with his genius for child exploration, saw that the essence of play does not consist in physical operations, but in physical accompaniments. Play is a mental attitude, and it is the mind sets of children that bring about the habits that make for the development of character.³

Play and Mental Hygiene:⁴ And on the side of mental hygiene play has a similarly essential function, for it is a breeze blowing away in introspective intensities, fixedness of ideas, self speculation, morbid obsessions, and subjective tangles. It serves as a cathasis of emotions centering in sex, fear, envy, and vanity.

¹ Norworthy and Whitley - Psychology of Childhood.

² Germane and Germane - Character Training.

³ Froebel.

⁴ LaRue's - Mental Hygiene.

Reading and Character Development: Good reading is one great an economical source of right concepts and ideals which ought to be accessible to every child. But too much must not be claimed for good reading as a direct character changing force. Failure to provide appropriate means of expressing in thought and action, emotions and ideals of good reading may very easily result not only in enervating of character, but in deterioration.

However good reading exerts its influence upon character in indirect ways. It provides the child with an outlet for his impulses and hence becomes a wholesome interest.

In brief, the value of good reading as a character molding agency is that it becomes another stimulating interest filling in the child's time and mind with many interesting pictures and ideals that challenge him to make the right choices, in this way causing the undesirable habits to die from disuse.

While too much must not be claimed for good reading as a direct molder of noble character, yet the following virtues are inherent in good books:

1. They supply right concepts and right concepts are needed before one can make wise choices.
2. They offer a most wholesome leisure interest and activity.
3. They are likely to inculcate worthy ideals of conduct which will help the child make right choices in perplexing life situations.

Music and Character: The general or humanistic aim of

music instruction is to contribute to the character of the individual and society an additional measure of the idealism, the joyous occupation with unselfish interest, the elevation and purification of feeling, and the psychic health dependent upon abundant but orderly expression of emotion, that come from appreciative contact with, and the endeavor to create or, recreate the beautiful in music.¹

Good music because it gives a balanced and complete satisfying outlet to the emotional urges effects character development. This should be taught in all grades.

Nature Clubs: The organization of nature clubs cannot be surpassed as a means of developing wholesome, clean interests in youth which will carry over to adult life. Immeasurable insight regarding the meaning and purpose of creation is revealed in the study of the stars, rocks, birds, flowers, insects and animal life. A child is touched profoundly when he senses his responsible place in the creation of things.

Young Peoples Organizations: Such organizations as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Cadets, and Hi-Y Reserves, whose aim is to encourage young people to live more abundantly should be encouraged. They give the child a greater sense of values. His contacts are greater and his sense of justice and rights of others will change.

A Dream of the Future if this Training is Stressed: We are not able to even illustrate in the most sketchy way the

¹ Fourth Year Book - 1926 - February, Washington, D. C.

effects already accruing to the real education of children through this new psychology and anthropology. The school-room instruction has been modified in almost every particular; the school yards have become paradises for children; the home is revolutionized; medicine has changed its nauseous doses; theology has softened its harsh structure; society has amended its barbarous laws, civil courts have reformed their procedures and if stress is given to the principles of character making, we shall dare to raise our eyes to that Utopian time when our city streets will be swept clean of their hordes of mentally twisted and scarred creatures whose warped characters make them enemies of society. We shall dare to think of the time when all God's creatures shall lie down together, the lion¹ and the lamb, and a little child shall lead them.

With discussions of various methods of character training the question arises, who should furnish the leadership and money for these movements?

Who Should? Nearly every community has men and women who are or were at one time proficient in some avocation. They should easily be induced to join in some sociolizing youth movement, if they felt the project to be worthwhile. If the talent is not forthcoming in the community the school should see the need of this social service enterprise to clubs and organizations.

In a small city system the three leading lodges and their

¹ Biblical quotation from Revelations.

women's club organizations are each sponsoring the three classes of the Senior High School. Once each month the lodge entertains or is entertained by the class that it is sponsoring, The pupils receive guidance, encouragement and instruction. The members of these lodges take their responsibilities seriously for the students come to them with their most perplexing problems. The teachers believe that nothing else has ever had such a salutary effect on scholarship and discipline as this show of adult interest and brotherhood.

So the writer brings to a conclusion this paper on character training.

To Conclude: What this generation of parents and teachers need is to feel that it is a vital part of the great relay race of on going civilization. Shall this generation so run this race as to give the next an overwhelming handicap or a significant lead? The answer depends upon insight and foresight which we exercise in human relationship. The logic of history makes us predecessors of a succeeding generation. We are at one and the same time both posterity and ancestry. We are not only children of our fathers, but fathers of our children. Every generation telescopes at each end into another. If we are standing on the shoulders of those that went before, those that come after shall in turn stand our shoulders. We, are, therefore not only building ^{on} a foundation laid by others but we ourselves are laying foundations on which others may build. What kind of a foundation shall we lay? Why of course, one

built on sterling character.

To Summarize Briefly: The important points in this paper are as follows: The writer has tried to show that, 1. character training is very essential; 2. that it should begin in early childhood and more attention given to it as the child grows in age. 3. There has been an enumeration of the agencies that have to do with character building. 4. The all importance of heredity and instincts in character building according to Trow and Weeks has been accounted for. 5. The value the home, community and schools articulation in bringing about this complete training has been told. 6. Well known educators have been quoted and facts placed herein.

This paper can in no wise be called an original contribution to the field of education, but it is the writers most sincere efforts to place herein some positive and proven facts about character training. The diction may be questioned and the grammatical construction found faulty but the effort to bring home some truths about our subject cannot be questioned.

Aug. 1, 1933.